



MAPPS Lobbies Congress

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Geospatial Solutions



"Uncle Sam may be the only entity in America that does not know what it owns," said Rep. Chris Cannon (R-UT) in remarks at the MAPPS Federal Programs Conference. Here, Cannon refers to a map showing the estimated percentage of federal land ownership in the Western United States as he discusses his recent introduction of H.R. 1370, the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act. Courtesy of MAPPS

Fresh from its 2005 Federal Programs conference, MAPPS (Management Association of Professional Photogrammetric Surveyors, www.mapps.org) officials have targeted a series of legislative initiatives in the 109th Congress that range across diverse, but specialized, federal programs — from a comprehensive survey of government lands and property to prodding NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) to open its own geospatial programs office. Also included in the mix are provisions to fully fund new contracting and outsourcing programs in the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), to name just a few agencies, as well as adding provisions in the federal highway bill to allow for greater use of private geospatial services by states. In all, MAPPS is supporting six individual pieces of federal legislation and a host of state measures as well. For its 2005 conference, held March 14–16, 110 participants from more than 32 states representing 67 MAPPS member firms made visits to more than 100 offices of congressmembers. Throughout the visits, MAPPS members stressed the importance of mapping and geospatial data to federal agencies.

For this first session of the 109th Congress, the shortened calendar that plagued last year's house and senate schedule is absent. With the additional legislative days available to conduct hearings and pass bills, prospects for at least some of these measures getting to the floor are brighter than in previous congresses. Moving these issues out this session is even more critical when considering what comes next. In the 2006 midterm election of George W. Bush's second term in office, the the entire house is up for election again, as are blocks of the 100-person senate. When midterms loom, it usually means legislative gridlock, with a meetings calendar shrunk to allow for campaigning and lesser bills locked inside their respective congressional committees — unable to get to the floor for a vote. Thus, the legislative window that opened in late January and runs through late fall is the geospatial industry's best chance in years for the passage of meaningful legislation.

In this setting, MAPP's top legislative priority is prodding Uncle Sam to inventory his own house.

A Federal FLAIR In February 2004, the Bush admini-stration began a slow process of taking inventory of federal properties. The president signed Executive Order 13327, which is aimed at better managing some of the federal government's real estate assets. The initiative included a requirement for an all-agency inventory, but, as MAPPS' Executive Director John Palatiello pointed out, had no requirement that the survey be GIS-based.

The order also excluded all U.S. public lands — meaning national-park acreage and other open recreational lands owned by the federal government. According to MAPPS, this exclusion omits much of the western states, which comprise the bulk of these lands. In Nevada, for instance, the federal government owns 91.9 percent of the total land area; in Alaska the amount is 66.7 percent; in Utah it owns 66.5 percent; and in Idaho the federal government owns 66.4 percent of the land area. In the District of Columbia — home base for most of the federal departments — however, federal ownership comprises only 26.3 percent of available lands. Yet the Bush order calls for a Districtwide land inventory of all federal land ownership. The most likely goal is to identify properties that could be sold off to generate revenue. Palatiello points out that 12 of the states that have larger federal land ownership than

Washington, D.C., are not identified in the executive order.

The answer to this and other omissions from the presidential directive was a legislative solution. It arrived in the House of Representatives' hopper March 17, right on the heels of the MAPPS federal programs meeting. A product of Utah Republican Rep. Chris Cannon, the proposed bill would set in motion a true federal cadastre. The bill, HR 1370, is called the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act, or more commonly, FLAIR. Cannon's goal was to fill in the gaps from the earlier executive-branch initiative with a more comprehensive review.

"Not only do we not know what the federal government owns, we also don't know what all the federal land is being used for, where its boundaries are located, or whether it is being put to its best use," Cannon told MAPPS' Federal Programs conference attendees. He also pointed out that the federal government owns 670 million acres of land, a staggering one-third of all land in the United States. And even that number, Cannon told MAPPS' attendees, is just an estimate. The true amount is unknown.



Bush Budget Cools Homeland Security R&D Growth

Cannon's bill calls for relying on private contractors to the maximum extent feasible to accomplish the inventory. He wants to ensure that all federal agencies with geographic interests are made part of the process, and that the inventory data be compatible with such existing GIS and geographic data systems as Geospatial One-Stop. Cannon also wants to align the federal inventory process with the recommendations in the National Academy of Sciences' 1980 *Need for a Multipurpose Cadastre* report, which outlined the need for a federal land survey.

The FLAIR tasks the secretary of the interior with structuring the cadastre to ensure better land management, conservation of resources, and identification of assets that could be considered unnecessary to keep on the federal real estate rolls. Cannon said that he wants to see the secretary split the cost of the inventory with states by way of including non-federal lands in the review. The bill also has some stiff performance and reporting requirements:

- The Department of Interior (DOI) must identify all current inventories
- The bill calculates the cost of maintaining inventories on an ongoing basis
- It proposes eliminating or consolidating these inventories across agencies
- DOI must give Congress an estimate of the cost savings that would result in such a consolidation
- DOI must give a comprehensive inventory to Congress when the work is complete
- It must also report to Congress any additional legislation that might be needed to enhance the results of the inventory or proposals to sell off or consolidate excess real estate.

Naturally, making sure that the inventory data are compatible with private sector and other uses is a key feature of the bill.

"We encourage congress to pass this bill, and we also hope that state and local governments take note of this bill and implement similar measures," said Ken Fleming, MAPPS president from LandAir Mapping. MAPPS had assembled a task force headed by Susan Marlow of Smart Data Strategies of Franklin, Texas. Marlow and the task force worked with Cannon and his staff to craft the bill.

"The Cannon bill is one of those laws that just makes sense to America," Marlow told the MAPPS meeting in Washington. "The federal government has a fiduciary responsibility to the citizens of this country to have an accurate inventory of all real-property assets. The United States is one of the few developed countries in the world that does not have a national property inventory," she added.

Palatiello expressed confidence that Cannon's FLAIR act stood a good chance of getting both a hearing and passage in this more normal congressional session.

But stay tuned.

More on the Legislative Plate The Cannon initiative isn't MAPPS' only federal legislative effort underway this session. Five additional House and Senate bills have been targeted for action, including outright opposition to one, along with some executive branch prodding.

Making TEA. Introduced by Rep. Don Young (R-AK) and cosponsored by 76 other House members, HR 3 seeks to reauthorize TEA-21 (Transportation Efficiency Act), the federal highway bill. Young is seeking to include a provision in the final version of the bill that strengthens the requirement for states to use the private sector for surveys, mapping, and geospatial programs and services.

Remote Sensing. HR 426, sponsored by Rep. Mark Udall (D-CO) is an attempt to increase the use of remote sensing and geospatial data in the public sector. MAPPS, however, is opposed to the original bill and is seeking instead to remove the bill's section 8 study of private-sector pricing and its proposed use of public-sector data.

Liquid Borders. HR 469, introduced by Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-AZ) seeks to authorize the Interior Department to work with states that border Mexico in conducting a hydrogeologic characterization, mapping, and modeling program for transboundary aquifers. MAPPS supports Kolbe's bill.

Public Impact. HR 585 is a bill introduced by Rep. George Radanovich (R-CA) that would require federal land managers to support, communicate, coordinate, and cooperate with designated gateway communities in U.S. Forest Service federal land-planning programs, as well as with other agencies of the Interior Department. The bill wants a review of the local impact of the public use of federal lands that are administered by DOI.

Companion Bill. MAPPS is also supporting a Senate bill, S 3 by Jeff Bingaman (D-MN), Peter Domenici (R-NM), and Jon Kyl (R-AZ). The proposed legislation is the Senate companion bill to HR 469.

But MAPPS' legislative goals aren't limited to Congress.

At the State Level The organization has been busy at the state level with several legislative initiatives of interest to the geospatial industry in seven states.

In Arkansas, HB 1178 addresses the Office of Information Technology budget request for the 2005-2007 biennium. Section 5 of the appropriation funds the Office of Information Technology. The monies come from the Geographic Information Systems Fund and will support such activities as the Arkansas State Land Information Board as well as create, operate, and maintain GeoStor, the state's spatial-data infrastructure.

In Maine, HB 564 is a bond issue in the amount of \$6 million. Funds from the bond would be used to enhance development of public geographic information through the Maine Library of Geographic Information, including digitizing town parcel maps and updating orthoimagery.

In New Jersey, AB 3807 creates a statewide building mapping information system for first responders. It seeks to appropriate \$5 million to the Office of Information Technology. The bill aims to supply first responders with the public-building mapping information necessary to evacuate a facility in the event of an emergency. Similarly, in New York state, SB 2359 creates a statewide first responder building mapping system to be supervised by the state police. And in Oregon, bill SB 562 directs the Office of Emergency Management to develop and operate a similar system.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, SB 1306/HB 2863 provides for licensing of photogrammetrists. At press time, both bills had passed both houses and were to be signed by Governor Mark Warner.

Finally, in Washington state, HB 2010 proposes a real estate excise tax to fund a statewide GIS.

As you can see, legislative activities affecting geospatial range deep and wide. For information about how to reach out to your representatives on issues of concern, visit www.mapps.org.